Dec. 14. 1890

Hymns

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Frederick Henry Hedge D.D.

"A workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

2 Timothy. ii. 11 - 15.

The man, whose character and whose services we are to ~~call to mind~~ remember at this time, possessed in some respects one of the most remarkable philosophic minds that this country has yet produced. He was a man of great learning and breadth of thought, entirely fearless in his search for truth, and very keen in penetrating those sophistries which deceive many by their appearance of reality. He was the friend and intimate of a circle of men whose names for a long time to come will mark a heroic period in our literature; and without doubt he has spoken to

the world not only through his own words, but through his influence upon those other illustrious minds. To the scholar, the thinker, and the poet, many fitting tributes have already been paid, and of the man in these wider relations to his time much yet remains to be said. But our special concern here is with the religious teacher who brought his great gifts to the work of the Christian Ministry, and who for sixteen years stood, Sunday after Sunday, in this very place speaking the Word of life to a company of eager listeners. We need not pause to try to define the Minister's particular task. But it should be evident that his aim and his methods are not exactly those of the men of letters, the scientist, or the theologian; just as the life of the practicing physician does not coincide at all points with that of the lecturer on anatomy or the science of health. Dr. Hedge was a profound student of the life of the soul

~~as~~ and spirit; but he was also a special minister to the needs of the men and women by whom he was surrounded. The way in which he was furnished for the work he did as Pastor of this Parish; the essential ~~thoughts~~ points of the message he delivered to this people, and the kind of influence he exerted upon the mind and heart of his congregation, – this is the subject your present inquiry.

What did Dr. Hodge think on the main topics about which a Christian Minister speaks? The answer to this question may be found in the ~~text~~ books he has written, and I desire to put before you his own words in testimony of his belief. – To begin with that which is ~~most~~ most outward. Dr. Hodge believed in the Christian church as a great providential instrument for helping forward the development of man's higher powers. Not that he cared in the least for any form ~~apart~~ apart from its spiritual content or significance. The road is of no

consequence when there is nobody to make use of it. But when there is an army to be moved or the commerce of a nation to be distributed, then the distance or absence of a road may make vast difference. Dr. Hodge believed in the Church as a "highway for our God:" as a great system of veins and arteries through which the life of the Spirit has penetrated to all ranks and classes of men. He never for a moment attempted to disguise the fearful ~~results~~ ills that have accrued from abuse of that system: but he held that the Church was planted for, and notwithstanding these ills, ~~has~~ has accomplished in part a divine purpose. "I believe," he says, "that the Holy Spirit in whatsoever manifestation or disguise, illumination or occultation, has never been wanting to the Church of Christ; has been in sunshine or in shade, in triumph, or in passion, the 'effectual working in the measure of every part', to 'the increase of the body' and the

'edifying of itself in love';— now emerging into solemn epiphany in seasons of "refreshing from the presence of the Lord," now engulphed in disastrous twilight; but still there, still active, though all its action may, at some dear crisis, have been confined to one poor, hunted, cowering sect, or folded up in a single agonizing breast."—*

In these days when so many are, ~~clearly~~ seemingly, of the opinion that wisdom was born with them, it is refreshing to read so strong an utterance of conviction that the work of the Lord has prospered during the ages behind us; and I count it not the least essential portion of a Minister's outfit that he should have this a clear sense of belonging to an institution which is something more than a product of human foresight and energy; being in some ~~sense~~ measure the agent, or instrument, of a divine purpose, and having before it a "manifest destiny" which no power of man can thwart. The Prophet's word, when spoken, needs some well-

* Ways of the Spirit p 69

established course by which it can be carried to the common heart. When Jesus came he spoke in the synagogues of his people; and though the doors of their Jewish churches were soon closed against him, it was, none the less, the training men had received from their religious institutions which opened many hearts to the truth he taught. Paul also found an opening for the Gospel to the Western world through the synagogues of his countrymen scattered throughout Asia Minor, ~~and to~~. To this day I believe it to be true that whatever message the spirit has to speak, it will in the end find its closest application to the world's need through the living voice of the Preacher. — Dr. Hodge, then, believes in the Church as an established way, built up at the expense of much labor and sacrifice, whereby the higher life is communicated from heart to heart. While the life is everywhere more than the means by which it sustains and extends its influence, this teacher would tell us

not to despise, but on the contrary, to carefully cherish and maintain those religious institutions whose work of facilitating spiritual intercourse and communion is ~~not~~ by no means yet finished. — The proof that in this I have rightly interpreted Dr. Hedges' attitude is that, in the division of feeling and opinion as to whether the Unitarian fellowship, by means of some denominational organization, should or should not, enter upon the work of building new churches, he gave his influence on the side of organization, and believed in providing for the liberal faith an organ~~ism~~ through which its truths might be carried more widely abroad.

Again, he believed in Christianity: the spiritual force or movement which ~~has~~, with varying degrees of fulness has made use of the channels laid down by the growth of the church. "So many centuries has Christianity builded its churches and administered its sacraments and published its scriptures, and so little as yet, has been seen and felt of Christ! But," he says, "this

first impression is founded on a very superficial view of Christian history and the Christian world. The written chronicle is necessarily a very imperfect account of what has been effected by the Gospel. This is not what the records have usually undertaken to exhibit. They report the exterior constitution of the Church, not its interior life. It would not be difficult to trace through all these centuries of Miracle, of strife and oppression, of theological hatred and priestly persecution, the secret windings and subtle ramifications of a sacred artery, a spiritual aorta, connecting the heart of Christendom with its utermost fibres, and filled with the blood of Christ. And in this our day, amid all the indifference and supineness, the skepticism and the scorn, the madness and the crime, which meet and appall us on every hand, it would not be difficult to discover unmistakable signs of deeper earnestness and truer devotion, of a more thorough penetration and occupation of this age by the spirit of Christ, than any

past time has known." *

While ~~he~~ he held no partisan quarrel with any ~~any~~ branch of the Church, he believed particularly in what is called Liberal Christianity, and with that ~~that~~ he cast in his lot. "We have," he declared, "a dual ~~dual~~ Christianity, — a legal and a liberal gospel, — ~~gospel~~ — the rigid and the fluid of Christian faith. ~~ist~~. There are other classifications and other antitheses in religion, — but none so comprehensive as this of legal and liberal, — the religion of law and the religion of grace. There is none which bisects with so trenchant a stroke the Christian world." †

"In the view of the legalist, God is arbitrary power, — a despot whose will makes right. In the view of the liberal, God is moral ideal, power in which right precedes will, — a love which causes all things to work together for the good of all. In the view of the legalist, man is naturally bad; sin his normal state. Depraved by an accident of history, he is incapable of good except by a radical

* Ways of the Spirit p. 93

† Ways of the Spirit p 285

change in his nature. In the view of the liberal, man is naturally imperfect, liable to sin, but also capable of good. Sin is an abnormal action of his nature, rectitude his normal state."* Here we have stated what is, unquestionably, the deepest root of difference between the faith of our fathers, and that which we have come to entertain. Dr. Hedge had none of the doubts which we often hear expressed concerning the future of the liberal faith. "I have," he says, "no misgivings respecting the cause of Liberal Christianity, whatever may become of the churches that embody it. If these fail, other communions will arise in their place, or legal communions will enlarge themselves to receive this element. The gospel has this side, ~~the~~ human nature has this side; and both will be sure to find expression."†*

Perhaps there is no better way to call attention to the ~~big~~ large catholicity of the man's mind, his singular freedom from party prejudice and passion, and the judicial attitude which he

[* Ways of Spirit p 209.] [† Ways of the Spirit p 314]

pressed in all his thought, - than to finish the quotation of this passage. It goes on: "I have no misgivings about orthodoxy. I rejoice in orthodoxy, and am deeply conscious how ill this factor could be missed from the sum of the forces that rule the world. Both religions will find their own. He who craves the largest liberty of thought and worship, and still affects the Christian name, and still acknowledges the Mastership of Christ, will be naturally drawn to the liberal side. He who requires for his edification the strong embrace of a close communion, the pulsing life of a vigorous organism, the warm breath of the crowded conventicle, the frequent assembly, the large operation, the triumphant report, will seek a lodgement in some legal church. Happily, the Christian idea is wide enough for both." *

Turning now from the earthward look, let us lift our eyes to the heavens, to see through the vision of our Teacher, what Power is

[Ways of the Spirit p 315]

them authorised, to execute righteousness and judgement for all the children of men, Dr. Hodge never come nearer to intolerance than when he had to speak of Atheism; and there it was not intolerance, but righteous indignation ~~with~~ with the vanity that generally underlies the atheist's professions. — "The atheist," he once said to a company of ministers, in his most impressive manner, "appears to me to be a man who calls his friends and neighbors together, and says to them: rejoice with me for I have lost my God." — The biting sarcasm is none too strong to characterize that mind which is not in serious earnest to solve life's great problem, but only to secure for itself a little cheap notoriety by attacking sacred things. — For all intellectual doubts and difficulties Dr. Hodge had perfect ~~charity~~ charity; but not for those who set up a store of these doubts as their stock in trade, and proceed to make use of them for their personal aggrandizement,

concerning the practical effects of Atheism as a creed, Dr Hedge has given a very clear expression of his opinion. He says: — "The school of Epicurus is ~~He is contrasting Epicurus and the~~ long since extinct, but the Epicurean mind survives; it ~~Stoic Schools of Philosophy: the Garden and the Porch;~~ prevails at this ~~last two days~~ " moment as widely perhaps as in any past age. — Our very reforms betray it; our philosophies are steeped in it, Universal relaxation of discipline, abolition of all pain, retribution ignored, all the strengths and austerities ruled out of life; softness in legislation and education, general amnesty of treasons and rascalities in this world, indiscriminate and unconditional bestowal of bliss in the next, — behold the spirit and creed of our day! — The world is no garden, and life no lullaby of endless blandishments, The individual, of his means to grow into a consummate spirit, must pass through wars and fightings to inward peace, must struggle up through want and weakness and bitter pain to light and freedom." —

As to the idea of God, and faith in his continual

Atheism in Philosophy p 49

presence. Dr Hedge held that these are given in the very nature of the human soul. "He who does not, like Adam in Paradise, hear the voice of the Lord God, walking in the garden, will never find him by following the anatomist along the dusky paths of death."* And again I quote his words: "In religion, it is sentiment that furnishes the stuff; and the intellect, that, by modifying and eliminating, gives the form. All that is essential in our idea of God we get, not from the understanding, but from the heart; and all that is essential in it is secured to us by the heart's perpetual need. —— When time is old, when science has fulfilled its career, and speculation repeated its ever-recurring circle, and both have confessed their incompetence alike to grasp or refute; when prophecies fail, and tongues have ceased, and fancied knowledge of the Absolute has vanished away, — the heart, the eternal child, with invincible faith, will still rejoice in Him, 'in whom we live and move and

*Ways of the Spirit, 186

have our being'."*

The vast idea of God presented itself to his mind, of course, in many lights, and we have of it, through his works, many different views. But chiefly he teaches us to think of God as an indwelling, all-pervading Holy Spirit, incorporating itself more and more with the life of men, as its highest and most complete expression. To him the great distinctive Christian idea was that of the Incarnation: the Divine word or Reason made flesh in Christ. He held this, not in any narrow, ecclesiastical fashion, but as type and prophecy of a divine humanity slowly being created at the heart of mankind. He believed that, historically, men had been led to the idea of a divine humanity by their conception of the divine, or even the Deity, in Christ; and God in man, — the Holy Spirit coming into human forms, was the continual burden of his preaching.

"I believe," he says," in the ever-preceding

[* Ways of the Spirit p. 222]

incarnation of the Spirit of God in human life. I believe in the ever-proceeding transubstantiation of the world into the similitude of the divine idea. The Trinitarian doctrine was a crude attempt to formulate these truths, but instead of their exponent, became their grave. Trinitarian theology has lost its hold of advancing Christian thought; but the thing it embodied, divine humanity, across all the mists of theology is struggling into light, is struggling into practical self-demonstration across all the atrocities and wars of time."*

Again; "Pray for the Spirit; for who in this world can do without it; without its impulse, without its leaven, without its sustaining and sustaining power. — It is not our laws and our courts, not well-balanced constitutions and social devices, not science and steam and electro-magnetism, — not these alone that have brought us thus far, and made this world what it is; but beneath all these and above them all, a divine impulse, never wanting in the race of men; a divine Spirit forever haunting

* Days of the Spirit p 355.

them with these two radical and universal ideas — truth and duty, without other penetrating and ~~creative~~ creative power — not one stone would ever have been laid upon another of all our cities, no line ever fixed, no human instrument fashioned for the work. And if God should now withdraw his Spirit, this proud civilization, with its gorgeous palaces and solemn temples; this shining and sounding culture, with its traffic and its arts, its stately conventions, and fair humanities, — would tumble and dissolve; the wild beasts that are caged in these human frames, now awed and tamed by the presence of that Spirit, would creep forth and roar and devour; and the civilized world would be chaos and night."*

From the presence of this Holy Spirit with men, Dr. Hodge derives his hope for the future of mankind upon the earth. He quotes, approvingly the prophecy of our great old Mystics, who "predicted a third age and dispensation of God, corresponding with the third ~~person~~ person in the Trinity. The first age,

[* Reason in Religion p 294]

representing God the Father, was the dispensation of the Law, the age of the Old Testament, — an age of bondage and fear. The second, representing the Son, was the age of the New Testament, — an age of instruction and discipline, a dispensation of doctrine. The third, representing the Holy Ghost, is to be an age of knowledge and spiritual emancipation, a dispensation of liberty and love. The first he characterizes as an age of bondsmen; the second an age of freedmen; the third of friends. — Six hundred years have rolled by since that Calabrian Monk delivered this sublime burden of the Lord; so far was the reign of holy and loving spirits outstrip the lordly-footed ages through which the execution of 'the pattern in the mount.' Six hundred years; and the Christian world still waits this consummation of its destiny."

In like manner his hope for the future of the individual soul was based upon the same great truth, — the sovereignty of the Divine Spirit over all man's works and ways. What he thought on the great subject of immortality,

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is not always perfectly clear; for like all honest minds he knew that the hope within him went farther than the intellect could follow. But his summing up of that deep question strikes the only key to which the melody of our hope in immortality is set. "Then on matters we may trustingly leave; when indeed, whether trustingly or not, we must leave them — with the infinite Love which embraces all our loves, and the infinite Wisdom which comprehends all our needs; assured that the Father of the home whose mansions are many, and the Father of spirits whose goal is one, will find the right place and connections and nurture for every soul he has caused to be; that in the Eternities the things dreamed and lost are found; that seeking and finding are divinely secured. Let us rest in the thought that life must be richer than all our experience, nay, than our fondest dream."

Such, in barest, briefest outline, was the

[Voyage of the Spirit p 567]

religious thought of our time to whom we all stand indebted more largely, ~~than~~ perhaps, than we can know; for he was emphatically, one who taught the teachers; and though many ~~who~~ of us were strangers to his personal presence, yet among us, I mean to say, he was strengthened and inspired by utterances which his thought has helped to shape. Through all his teaching there was a note of serene and confident, yet withal perfectly sober and healthful optimism. And he knew from whence this confidence came; that it was the voice, not alone of his private judgement of the world in which he lived, but still more of the Spirit that was in him; a native affirmation of the heart, before ever it became an acquired information of the head. I cannot forbear once more to quote his words, to complete the sketch I have tried to present. - Dr. Hodge was a giant of the intellect; No man has stood among us in

this question with greater breadth or penetration of view to repeat to us what the intellect has to say on life's deeper problems. I say this advisedly; for the repetitions philosophers of our scientific age, scarcely touch these problems at all. For this side gibbet, they come to a great wall through which, they declare, there is no opening. Dr. Hedge did not halt at that obstacle. ~~He~~ He believed that there was a way over, if not through it; and he gained an elevation from which he saw truths that many of the most famous minds of this age have yet to learn. But just because his intellectual vision was so clear and keen, he fully realized, what younger thinkers are slow to admit, that the intellect alone cannot answer life's enigma. He gives the most satisfactory answer that the intellect affords, and then he says:

"But after all is said that philosophy has to say on this subject, however satisfactory and

incontrovertible in theory, the ills of life present an explicable mystery still to the heart. We may talk about the best possible world, and may think we believe in it; but a great sorrow makes us forget all that. —— The enigma is not solved by philosophy, but solved, if it all, by an act of faith. Faith has to our optimism, very different from that of the understanding, a very difficultly put. It is perfectly expressed in that homely phrase, which contains, I think, the sum of all wisdom in relation to this matter: 'It is all for the best. All plagues and harms that lacerate the soul, the war of elements, the worst of men, the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune, all wounds of the heart, all losses and deaths, are ministers of good: a Divine purpose works in all. Work when stones in our path, the unchangeable law is laying the corners of the house of life, strong against all the accidents of earth and all the wear of time."*

(*Reason — Religion p. 122)

And so we come back to the philosophy of the heart, which Dr. Hodge called "the eternal child." Its answer is the true answer to the Riddle of the Sphinx: "me because 'I' is the voice of nature, the answer taught by the Spirit of God within us, beside which the wisdom of man is no more than utter foolishness.

This is the Gospel that has been preached to us; preached with an absolute sincerity of soul which fastened its utterances in the listeners' mind as with barbed points of steel. We do not all see alike; and of all contemptible habits of a little mind, one of the meanest is that of charging insincerity upon those who disagree with its vision. Dr Hodge could not have lived and escaped that charge.‡ But I believe that all his intellectual work was done as in the sight of God. No man was farther from catering to any illusion, or trying to delude himself with specious fancies. He hated a lie, or a pretense, with a perfect hatred; and so for

as God gave him power to see and know, he brought into his work nothing save what comes sunny from the most searching analysis or solid truth. The wonderful influence of his speech came, I think, for the most part from the quality of his mind. He had great power of statement. He was a master of language such as one is seldom privileged to read or hear. - He had great learning and the wealth of his knowledge was evident in all that he said. Still other men have these gifts and acquirements and we do not hang upon their words with that peculiar heart of expectancy which characterizes an audience that has assembled to hear Dr. Hodge. Knowing something of the man who was to address them, more than all else I think it was the perfect assurance that he was incapable of playing upon them any trick - of dressing up for them any hollow insincerity in an attractive garment of words; that whether they got much

or little from his talk, they were sure of being dealt with in absolute intellectual honesty. This it was that most strongly commended the attention of his hearers.

He spoke habitually on the highest and the deepest themes. The superficial mind which wants to be gently stimulated by commonplace suggestions did not much affect his preaching. Kind friends are never wanting to tell such an one that he ought to take up, in lighter fashion, the questions of the hour. But Dr. Hodge knew better than to listen to such advice. The man who is capable of playing the music of the spheres does not spend his time rehearsing the tunes which every hand organ upon the street can play. He spoke out of the depths of his soul to every soul which had been made conscious, by life's hard experience, of the deeps of its being. To all such he was sent as by divine commission; and well did he fulfil the task assigned him. —

For he spoke always under a strong sense of the responsibilities of one who deals with spiritual issues, and with an earnest sympathy for all minds that walked, with open eyes, amid the almost overwhelming mysteries of our being. To him it was no light thing (how can it be to any sensitive spirit?) to put his hand upon the delicate mechanism of the human heart, and assume to regulate or guide its movements. He was often appalled by a sense of the difficulties of the ~~work~~ results of all ~~our efforts~~ our efforts to do this work. — He felt, he saw, I suppose, that this limitation of our influence is the world's great safeguard against incautious tampering; and he knew that the little change produced in the inner chambers of thought and purpose and desire, would count for more in the end than any amount of superficial repair which failed to touch the springs of the life. —

Ordinarily reserved in manner, his

nature being incrusted with that somewhat stony covering which has become hereditary in our New England character, he carried within one of the tenderest, most affectionate and most sympathetic hearts that ever beat in a human breast. — He felt the sorrows of his friends as if they were his own. If ever his eyes were blinded by any prejudice, it sprang from his affections. He could not easily think ill of those he loved. He carried on his soul in some measure, as did that Christ whom he called Master, the burden of the world's sin and suffering and shame. — The world could not be wholly bright to him, with the light in so many human souls turned utterly to shadow and darkness. He was too honest to pretend that all sorrow was a just retribution for sin; too wise to spend his energies ~~to~~ in mere aimless buzzing about the dark problem and call that the application of a remedy or cure. He saw the huge

sore of the world stretching wide and deep across the otherwise fair work of God. He could not wholly explain its presence. But he would do what he could to strengthen the vital forces that were in conflict with this great wrong, and he would listen to the faith of his heart which told him that somehow, and at some time, it should all be made right.—

For my part, I believe that in the final summing up of the influences that have played their part in human affairs; in that day when many that have been first shall appear last and the last first, a life like this, which has wrought much in silent, secret ways, will stand for more than many a name of world-wide fame. It is not the place where work is done, but the reality of the work, which is of most significance; and it may prove, after all, that not the orator of the Salvation Army, (though he is, undoubtedly, an agency of good), but the great scholar and

thinker, ~~who~~ has supplied most plentifully the new streams of health that rush down to sink and save the lost;--

A deal of good seed is sown in this world in soil so shallow that the harvest withers long before it is ripe.- Dr. Hedge was one who drove his furrow deep into the sub-soil of our human nature, and wholesome seed ~~is~~ he planted, though it may be long in coming to maturity, will surely bear abundant fruit.

If only these walls might speak! If but the echo of that well-~~known~~ remembered voice, which has so often filled this place, might now come back to us, in the measured cadence of his solemn discourse! The very memory of it steals over our spirits like the music of cathedral choirs. If in these seats we might see the faces that have kindled to the glow of his thought, and have turned again to front life's duties, with the light of a stronger and nobler purpose in their eyes! Gone! They

are gone, – whither we too must follow. —
The grass withereth; the flower fadeth! It is
only the word of our God, the eternal truths of
the spirit, that can endure for ever. – Grievous
are these losses of time; but they should bring
us nearer our peace and rest in the strong
keeping of the Infinite One.

"Smite Lord: thine hammer's needful wound
My baffled hopes confess;
Thine anvil is the sense profound
Of mine own nothingness.

"Smite, till, from all its idols free,
And filled with love divine,
My heart shall know no God but Thee,
And have no will but Thine."